



OUTDOOR LUNCH BEST PRACTICES

Simple, approachable guidelines to help every school in APS provide access to outdoor meals for every student.

SUPERVISION

For high schools, students may already be allowed to go outside unsupervised for lunch. For middle schools, it is suggested to have two adults present, in case one has to deal with a situation with a student. For primary grades, one option is to have students seated in chairs or on mats at 6' distance while eating and unmasked, then move directly to recess in cohorts.

TIMING

Middle school lunch will be 35 minutes long, however, with it being a grab and go scenario (no hot food service, no choices, no cashier) the line should move extremely fast. Speed is also aided by the vastly reduced cafeteria head count.

WEATHER

Students are normally comfortable outside if the temperature is above 40 degrees, unless it is raining or too wet from previous rain. *(Note: in March, the average high is 56, the average low is 35, and there is an average of 7 days of rain. For the COVID time period, to reduce cafeteria numbers, some schools may wish to go outside even if the temperature is below 40 degrees.)*

ACTIVITIES

Students should be masked when not eating, even when outdoors. Right now the advice is to avoid all sports that involve shared equipment. Remember that under almost all circumstances being outdoors is safer than being indoors. Make being outdoors enjoyable so a maximum number of students are encouraged to be outside.

Notes from the Field

These notes are provided based on years of managing outdoor lunch at one of the middle schools in the county, by the TJMS Community Garden Coordinator/Outdoor Learning Chair.

Worried about how outdoor lunch actually works? Here's some real talk about managing students, weather, and activities outdoors.

SUPERVISION NOTES

I have found that lunch supervision's effectiveness is determined more often by the management style of the adults than the number of adults. We try to always have a minimum of two adults for outdoor time. The key is to remind yourself what qualifies as age appropriate behavior and triage your interventions to those behaviors which pose life-safety risks or having students' experiences at lunch unfavorable. Basically, I don't get too overly involved unless somebody is going to get hurt or somebody is a victim of taunting, harassment, or some other type of ridicule which could ruin a child's day. Ultimately, most days we have two adults inside and two adults outside. You always need to have two adults because one might become temporarily unavailable due to an unexpected problem.

TIMING NOTES

We allow students who plan to go outside get their lunches first.

WEATHER NOTES

During the school year we use 40 degrees as our determining factor. Above 40 we go out, less than that we stay in. The problem is, if you have too few takers to go out you are left with more kids indoors, yet two of the total four lunch staff would still have to go outside with a small group of kids and thus leave a larger group indoors with two staff. If everything is wet or it's raining we tend to stay in.

ACTIVITIES NOTES

During COVID we have been discouraged from any sports which involve close person to person spacing or shared contact of balls, Frisbees, etc.